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Local biz

Business perking up for Boulder's Pekoe Sip House

Local tea shop adding Boulder, CU locations
By Alicia Wallace, For the Colorado Daily
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Marti Meade, right, makes drinks at the recently opened Pekoe Sip House in the Steelyards at 30th Street and Mapleton Avenue on Monday. At left is Max Ritter. The tea and coffee shop took over the location from Joe's Espresso, and plans to open another shop in the University of Colorado's ATLAS building next week. (Marty Caivano / For the Colorado Daily)

Steeping at the Ideal Shops on North Broadway in Boulder for the past six years, Pekoe Sip House has quietly spread its wings during the past 12 months.

The homegrown tea shop opened a second location in Denver last year; bought Joe's Espresso off 30th Street in Boulder in April; and expects to open a fourth location at the University of Colorado's ATLAS building next week.

"We've just been experiencing some awesome opportunities that are coming up," owner Paul Cattin said.

In 2003, Cattin opened the first Pekoe at 1225 Alpine Ave. in Boulder. Cattin -- fresh off running the Tea Train in Longmont -- wanted to create a relaxing, laid-back environment for people to enjoy loose-leaf teas, tea-based blended drinks, coffee made via a French press and espresso-based drinks that have their beans grounded fresh per order.

During the next couple of years, as Pekoe solidified its concept, it subsequently gained a following, Cattin said, and the time became right recently to grow.

"The original vision was that we would be a multi-store concept," he said. "Quality is our No. 1 factor; so slow, quality growth, versus just expanding..."

"I'm a strong believer of you can't forget your roots and where you come from."

Pekoe's latest café will position the company in the center of the CU campus and in a building that will be located just east of a soon-to-be constructed major pedestrian thoroughfare on campus, said John Bennett, director of the ATLAS (Alliance for Technology, Learning and Society) building.

"We're thrilled," he said. "We had a lot of students and faculty that wanted not only the espresso kind of drinks, but good coffee and good tea."

Pekoe will be located in the café formerly run by coffee shop company Vic's, which had operated in the ATLAS building since its inception in 1996. CU decided not to renew Vic's lease, said Mike Hilliker, a Vic's co-owner. Bennett said it was a mutual decision.

While Vic's lost one location, like Pekoe, it has been expanding despite a down economy. The company opened



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two coffee shops -- one in Longmont off Airport Road and the other in the former McDonald's off Table Mesa in Boulder -- within the past couple months.

"Overall, I think the coffee business is a good business to be in, in these times," Hilliker said. "It's a low-ticket item and it's a way for people to get out and be social. I think there's some resiliency built into it."

Pekoe's Cattin said he has noticed a similar trend with specialty teas -- customers still seem to be affording themselves the little indulgences.

Specialty teas -- including loose-leaf and single-origin teas -- account for about 10 percent of the \$7 billion tea market, said Joe Simrany, president of the Tea Association of the United States of America.

The specialty tea market has seen some softness as consumers pull back from the typically higher-priced offerings, he said. However, that shouldn't be a long-term trend, he added, noting people have gravitated more toward tea recently because of health benefits.

"The allure of specialty tea is strong and the demand for specialty is strong," he said.

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